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News Release

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FBI agent honored for her work on child exploitation

Protecting children from exploitation is a priority for the United States Justice Department, and an agent with the Minneapolis office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation was recognized for her role in several exploitation prosecutions last year.

Special Agent Maureen Lese was presented today with the ninth annual U.S. Attorney's Office Law Enforcement Recognition Award at the U.S. Courthouse in Minneapolis.

"We are very pleased to bestow the 2007 U.S. Attorney's Law Enforcement Recognition Award on FBI Special Agent Maureen Lese," said U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill. "Special Agent Lese was selected for this award because of her commitment to fighting the sexual exploitation of children. She works tirelessly in pursuit of those who exploit our children, and her ability to collaborate with our federal, state and local partners is truly exceptional. Due to Special Agent Lese's dedication to the cause of justice, we have been able to get many child predators off our streets and off the Internet. The public truly owes Special Agent Lese a debt of gratitude for her efforts."

Lese began her career with the FBI in March 1992. She has been a special agent for more than 16 years in the Minneapolis Division. She has been working predominately child pornography cases under the FBI's Innocent Images National Initiative (IINI) program for more than seven years. She has been the Crimes Against Children Coordinator for the Minneapolis Division for several years.

Lese earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of Iowa in 1987, and has taken extensive training in the investigation of child pornography and child predator investigations. She is regarded as the FBI's expert in IINI investigations in the Minneapolis Division. During the last several years, Lese has provided training to federal, state, and local law enforcement personnel on the investigation of child pornography matters and given countless safety presentations to local students, faculty, and youth organizations.

Special Agent in Charge Ralph S. Boelter, the head of the Minneapolis Division of the FBI observed "even in Minnesota, which has many talented law enforcement investigators, Special

Agent Lese stands out as truly exceptional in her ability to find the truth and build high quality cases.”

“She is a top-flight FBI agent in every respect,” Boelter said. “We simply could not be more grateful or proud that she has been recognized in this manner.”

“Maureen Lese is a tireless advocate for the children of Minnesota and a tenacious pursuer of internet predators,” said St. Paul Police Officer Neil Nelson, head of the Minnesota Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force (MICAC). “Her dedication to this mission has made Special Agent Lese the No. 1 federal resource for the 39 state and local law enforcement agencies that make up the Minnesota Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force. The one-two punch of the MICAC and Special Agent Lese has meant the end for many child predators in our state. Congratulations for this well-deserved recognition.”

Child exploitation prosecutions are part of Project Safe Childhood (PSC), a national initiative that encourages the use of multi-jurisdictional task forces to investigate and prosecute cases that involve the sexual exploitation of children over the Internet. PSC urges that law enforcement efforts be complemented by community-wide campaigns to assist victims of exploitation and to educate parents, other adults, and children about Internet safety.

Lese, who has worked on numerous child exploitation prosecutions, was the primary investigator for two that resulted in strong sentences in 2007. The first case was against Todd Hammond of Cass County. He was sentenced on July 25, 2007, to 30 years in prison for producing child pornography.

Hammond had met his child victim through a community mentoring program, and had sexually abused the child. He used the Webcam on his computer to live-stream the abuse over the Internet to others who receive sexual gratification from sex with children. The child victim was age 9 when he met Hammond, and was 11 and 12 when the abuse occurred.

The second case was against Lyle Paton of St. Paul. He was sentenced on Aug. 6, 2007, to five concurrent life terms for producing child pornography. In each case, Paton enticed five minors to engage in sexually explicit conduct for the purpose of having that conduct photographed. In return, Paton gave the minor boys food, clothing, money and toys.

A search of Paton’s home yielded, among other things, 114 images of child pornography on computer memory cards and four images of child pornography on a computer. The investigation also led to the identification of more than 25 victims of sexual abuse or exploitation.

According to the U.S. Department of Justice, one in 33 children receives an unwanted sexual solicitation online each year. One in four children experiences unwanted exposure to sexually explicit material on the Internet each year. More than 20,000 images of child pornography are posted on the Internet every week. Moreover, recent research conducted by the Federal Bureau of Prisons indicates a strong correlation between possessing or distributing child pornography and committing sexual-contact crimes against children.

The MICAC was created in 2000 through a grant from the Justice Department’s Internet Crimes Against Children program. The MICAC is one of almost 50 federally funded task forces in the country dedicated to this issue.

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The U.S. Attorney's Office Law Enforcement Award is presented annually to a state, federal or local law enforcement agent or officer who has worked on federal cases. In addition, the recipients are recognized for their significant contributions to the enhancement of state and federal cooperation in law enforcement.

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Caption: FBI Special Agent Maureen Lese is the 2008 recipient of the U.S. Attorney's Office Law Enforcement Award, and was recognized Sept. 26 at the U.S. Courthouse in Minneapolis. From left: U.S. Attorney Frank J. Magill, Lese, and Ralph S. Boelter, special agent in charge of the FBI's Minneapolis Division.